

MEMPHIS NAVY YARD.

MESSAGE

FROM THE

PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES,

TRANSMITTING

A report in reference to the navy yard at Memphis, Tennessee.

JANUARY 4, 1855.—Referred to a Select Committee, and ordered to be printed.

To the House of Representatives:

In response to the resolution of the House of Representatives of the 11th ultimo, requesting the President "to communicate to this House any proposition which may have been made to the government by the city authorities of Memphis, relative to the navy yard property recently ceded to that city, together with his views and those of the Navy Department as to the propriety of accepting the proposed re-cession and of re-establishing a naval depot and yard of construction at Memphis," I transmit herewith a report of the Secretary of the Navy, and have only to add my concurrence in the views by him presented.

FRANKLIN PIERCE.

WASHINGTON, D. C., *January 1, 1855.*

NAVY DEPARTMENT, *December 26, 1854.*

SIR: I have the honor to submit the following report in pursuance of the resolution passed by the House of Representatives on the 11th instant, in these words:

"*Resolved*, That the President be requested to communicate to this House any proposition which may have been made to the government by the city authorities of Memphis, relative to the navy yard property recently ceded to that city, together with his views and those of the Navy Department as to the propriety of accepting the proposed re-cession and of re-establishing a naval depot and yard of construction at Memphis."

Accompanying this report is a correct copy (marked A) of the pro-

ceedings of the board of mayor and aldermen of the city of Memphis, received on the 7th of November last. These proceedings present the only "propositions" which have been made through this department to the government, by the city authorities of Memphis, relative to the navy yard recently ceded to that city.

You will perceive that the city authorities do not propose an unconditional retrocession, but accompany it with certain specified terms, to which Congress must agree. They disclaim the design of holding it, "provided that Congress shall in its wisdom, in justice to the South and West, desire to reinstate said yard, not as a ropewalk *alone*, but as a depot of construction and equipment of government vessels for the navy." They further say that they will deem it their duty, "in consideration that Congress agree to carry out their original plan of keeping up and carrying on a navy yard of construction at Memphis," to retrocede the property.

Congress has the power to discontinue any of the navy yards, or to convert some of them into ropewalks, and to devote others to the manufacture of machinery or ordnance. But if the terms of the proposition under consideration be acceded to, Congress will have surrendered its discretion, and will be bound to keep up *this* as a yard for the "construction and equipment of government vessels for the navy," although future experience may demonstrate that it would be economy and sound policy to abandon the undertaking to construct and equip vessels, and, instead thereof, to devote it exclusively to the manufacture of machinery for our steamships, and ordnance to supply them with armaments, or to convert it into a ropewalk for the manufacture of cordage, or to discontinue it entirely.

I cannot consider it wise policy in the government to own property involving large expenditures of money upon *conditions* to which in good faith it may be bound to adhere, although found by experience to be impolitic. My views, therefore, are adverse to the propriety of accepting the retrocession on the terms proposed by the city authorities. This government now has eight navy yards, including that in progress of construction at San Francisco. They are located at Kittery, in Maine; Charlestown, Massachusetts; Brooklyn, New York; Philadelphia, Pennsylvania; Washington, D. C.; Norfolk, Virginia; and Pensacola, Florida. In my opinion, these are amply sufficient for the present wants of the United States; and no other yards of "*construction and equipment*" of vessels are needed at this time.

Inquiry may be made, perhaps, as to the local advantages or disadvantages presented at Memphis, in regard to necessary depth of water and the practicability of securing the proper foundation to sustain building-slips and launching-ways and docks. There was a report made by a board of officers appointed by the Secretary of the Navy in 1844, September 16, which is to be found in Executive documents 2d session 28th Congress, volume 1; another by a board similarly appointed in 1851, June 11, to be found in Ex. Docs. 1st session 32d Congress, volume 2, part 2. An elaborate report was also made by the Senate Naval Committee, May 6, 1852, which is to be found in Senate Reports 1st session 32d Congress, volume 2. These several reports present the results of personal inspection, and discuss elabo-

rately the question of the suitableness of this location for a navy yard. To them I take the liberty of referring you.

To institute additional inquiry by the actual examination of another board, in order to present facts and views suggested by their action, would necessarily delay a response to the resolution until the session is far advanced.

I have the honor to be, very respectfully, your obedient servant,
J. C. DOBBIN.

To the PRESIDENT.

A.

CITY HALL, MEMPHIS, *October 23, 1854.*

At a called meeting of the board of mayor and aldermen of the city of Memphis, on Monday, October 23, 1854—present his honor the Mayor, Messrs. Neal, Hughes, Smithwick, Morgan, Milton, Junkins, Patrick—in the absence of the chairman, Mr. Douglass, Alderman Patrick was called on to preside. On taking the chair, he explained that the meeting was called for the purpose of requesting the Secretary of the Navy to suspend the sale of government property, now advertised to take place at the Memphis navy yard on the 1st day of November next, until after the meeting of Congress.

Alderman Hughes being seconded, offered the following preamble and resolutions:

Whereas we, the mayor and aldermen of the city of Memphis, view with deep regret what we conceive to have been hasty legislation in the late act of Congress ceding the Memphis navy yard and appurtenances to the city of Memphis, thereby depriving the citizens of the great valley of the Mississippi of the benefits of a great national work; and whereas we deem this work of equal importance to any similar work in the eastern States, and that justice to the citizens of the great valley of the Mississippi demands its continuance; and whereas the board of mayor and aldermen of Memphis believe that Congress may at its next session be induced to reconsider its act ceding the Memphis navy yard to the city of Memphis: Therefore—

Resolved by said board, That, in our act receiving said navy yard, we fully disclaim the design of holding it to our own use. Provided that Congress shall in its wisdom, in justice to the South and West, desire to reinstate said yard, not as a ropewalk *alone*, but as a depot of construction and equipment of government vessels for the navy, we shall deem it our duty, in consideration that Congress agree to carry out their original plan of keeping up and carrying on a navy yard of construction at Memphis, to reconvey the navy yard at Memphis, grounds and appurtenances, to the general government.

Resolved further, That the mayor immediately notify the Secretary of the Navy, at Washington city, both by mail and telegraph, of the foregoing proceedings, with the request that he suspend the sale of the government property at the Memphis navy yard, now advertised to

take place on the 1st of November next, until after the next meeting of Congress in December.

Which proceedings were, on motion, adopted unanimously by the board.

The above and foregoing is a true and perfect extract from the minutes of the proceedings of the board of mayor and aldermen had on the 23d instant.

J. M. PATRICK,

President pro tem. of the Board of Mayor and Aldermen.

A. B. TAYLOR, *Mayor.*

Attest:

L. R. RICHARDS,

City Register.

MEMPHIS, *October 24, 1854.*

MAYOR'S OFFICE, MEMPHIS, *October 24, 1854.*

DEAR SIR: On the opposite hereof please find a copy of the proceedings of the board of mayor and aldermen of this city had on yesterday, requesting you to suspend the sale of the government property in the Memphis navy yard until after the next meeting of Congress; all of which is respectfully submitted.

Respectfully,

A. B. TAYLOR, *Mayor.*

Hon. J. C. DOBBIN,

Secretary of the Navy.